

The Other Anna

By Evelyn Sharp

THERE were flights and flights of wide, cold, dreary stone stairs, and at the top of them three studios in a row. Pinned on the door of the furthest one was a notice to the effect that the owner had gone out to lunch and would not be back until two, and it was this that caused the discontent on the face of the girl who sat on the edge of the stairs, drumming her toes impatiently on the step below.

“And I promised to be here at half-past one,” she grumbled, shivering a little as she spoke; and she got up and paced the landing quickly, and stamped her feet to keep warm. A man opened the door of the middle studio with a jerk, and looked out.

“Are you waiting for anybody? Hadn't you better go away and come again presently? Mr. Hallaford won't be back for another half-hour,” he said, in short rapid sentences. There was a frown on his face, but whether it came from nervousness or annoyance she could not tell. It was evident, though, that she worried him by being there, for it was the second time he had spoken to her; and she gave her chin the slightest tilt into the air as she answered him.

“Go away? Down all those stairs? I couldn't really!” she said with an irritating smile.

“Oh

"Oh well," began the man, frowning again, "if you like hanging about——"

"I don't like it a bit," she assured him, earnestly. "It is the stupidest occupation imaginable. You should just try it and see!"

But this he showed no anxiety to do, for the mere suggestion precipitated him into his studio again, and she concluded that the frown must have been nervousness after all. She returned to her seat on the stairs, but had hardly settled herself in her corner when the door opened behind her once more, and the owner of the middle studio was again jerking out his abrupt remarks at her back.

"It's no use staying out there in the cold," he said, as though she were somehow morally responsible for the inclemency of the weather. "There's a fire in here, and my model hasn't come back yet. You can come in and wait, if you like."

"All right; I don't mind if I do," she said carelessly, and followed him in. Common gratitude or even civility, she felt, would have been wasted on a man who threw his hospitality at her head; and it was only the unfriendliness of the stone stairs outside, and perhaps her desire for adventure as well, that made her accept his offer at all. But when he did not even trouble to give her a chair, and resumed his occupation of stretching a paper on a board without noticing her in the least, Anna began to feel puzzled as well as slighted. He was certainly odd, and she always liked odd people; he might be nervous into the bargain, and nervousness was a failing so far removed from her own personality that she was always inclined to tolerate it in another; but neither nerves nor eccentricity could quite explain his want of manners, and she had never had to endure discourtesy from a man before. She prepared resentfully to assert herself, but before she had time

to choose her words a sudden suspicion darted into her mind. This was a studio, and the owner of it was an artist, and he had found her hanging about another man's studio. How could he be supposed to know that she was only having her portrait painted, and was not a professional model at all? The idea, when she had once grasped it, amused her immensely; and she resolved impulsively to play the part he expected from her. The adventure was promising well, she thought.

"What fun!" she said aloud, and her host glanced up at her and frowned. Of course, she wanted him to frivel with her, and he did not mean to be frivoled with. So he said nothing to encourage her, and she sat down and scanned the room critically. It was very bare, and rather dusty.

"I suppose it's because you're a man," she observed, suddenly. She was only finishing her thoughts out loud, but to him it sounded like another attempt to draw him into conversation, and he felt irritated by her persistence. He never wanted to talk much at any time, and his attitude towards the confidences of his models was one of absolute indifference. He did not care to know why they had become models, nor how their people had lost their money, nor what sort of homes they had; they were there to be drawn, that was all. But he realised vaguely that Anna was there by his invitation, and he made an effort to be civil.

"It accounts for most of my actions, yes," he said, and set down the board and began filling his pipe.

"I mean," she explained, "that if you were a woman you might make this place look awfully nice. You could have flowers, for instance, and——"

"Oh yes," he interrupted; "and photographs, and muslin, and screens."

"Well, you might," she said, calmly. "But I shouldn't.

Flowers

Flowers would be enough for me, and perhaps a broom and a duster. But then, I'm not a man."

"No," he said, just as calmly. "If you were, you would know that one does not take one's suggestions about these things from a woman."

Even in her assumed character she was not quite prepared for the scant courtesy of his reply, and he inferred from her silence that he had succeeded in quenching her at last. But when he glanced at her over his shoulder, he was rather disconcerted at finding her eyes fixed on his face with an astonished look in them. He was always absent-minded, and when he was not at work he was unobservant as well; and he asked himself doubtfully whether her cheeks had been quite so pink before he made his last remark. Any other man would have noticed long ago that she had not the manner or the air of the ordinary model; but Askett did not trouble to argue the point even for his own satisfaction. She was a little more ladylike than most of them, perhaps, but she resembled the rest of her class in wanting to chatter, and that in itself justified his abruptness. So there was a pause that was a little awkward, and then his model came in—an old man in a slouched hat and a worn brown coat.

"What a musty old subject to choose!" she commented, and got up instantly and walked away to the door.

"Wouldn't you care to wait until Hallaford comes back?" asked her host, a little less morosely. "I can go on working all the same, as long as you don't talk."

"I shouldn't think of it," she said, emphatically. "I am quite sure you wouldn't be able to endure another suggestion from me, and I really couldn't promise not to make one."

He could have sworn that her last words were accompanied by a lightning glance round the room, but her expression, when she turned

turned at the door and looked at him, was almost vacant in its innocence. He followed her hastily, and opened the door for her.

"You'd better wait," he said, involuntarily. "You'll catch cold or something out there."

She flashed a mocking look up in his face.

"Don't you think," she observed, demurely, "that that is one of the things about which one does not want suggestions from a man?"

Ten minutes later, she was accepting a torrent of apologies from Tom Hallaford with a queenly forgiveness that she knew by experience to be the most effective weapon at her command.

"If you weren't such an awful brick you'd never sit to me again," he avowed, humbly. "To drag you all this way, and then——! Wasn't it beastly cold too?"

"It was cold," Anna admitted, gently. "But I didn't mind much."

And when he began afresh to abase himself, and made the confusing statement that he ought to be shot and was hanged, she felt he had suffered sufficiently, and she interrupted him by a true account of how she had spent the last half-hour.

"Well, I'm bothered!" he said. "Of course, Askett thought you were a model, a *paid* model, don't you see; and he thought it was just cheek of you to say his studio was dirty and all that. So it would have been rather, don't you know, if you'd been an ordinary model; they want jumping on sometimes. I say, Miss Angell," he added, chuckling, "what larks if Askett comes in when you've gone, and asks me for your address! Ten to one he does. What shall I say?"

"I don't fancy," said Anna, quietly, "that he will want to know."

Nevertheless,

Nevertheless, as she was hurrying past the door of the middle studio, two hours later, Askett came out hastily and called her back.

"Is all your time filled up for the present?" he asked, "or could you sit to me next week, in the afternoons?"

A gleam of mischief lurked in her eyes, but he was still unsuspecting, and he mistook her hesitation for reflection.

"I could come next week," she said. "What time?"

"Two o'clock on Monday. And you can give me your name and address so that I shall know where to write to you. You'll very likely forget all about it."

"Do you really think that's possible?" smiled Anna. Askett said nothing, but looked over her head at the wall as though she were not there at all, and waited for her to reply. Anna was racking her brains for a name that would be likely to belong to a model.

"Well?" he said, impatiently.

"Oh, you want my name?" said Anna, desperately. "Well, my address is care of Miss Anna Angell, 25 Beaconsfield Mansions, Belgravia. And my name is—is Poppy—Poppy Wilson. Oh dear! that's wrong—I mean——"

He was staring at her, for the first time, with something approaching ordinary human interest.

"There seems to be a difficulty about the name," he remarked. He was not surprised at all; she had probably quarrelled with her family—models always had—and so was afraid to give her real name. He put down her confusion to the fact that she had not been sitting long, and was new at the deception. "What's the matter with Wilson?" he asked, not unkindly. "It's a very nice name, isn't it?"

"Oh, Wilson's all right," she hastened to assure him. "It's
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the Poppy that's wrong ; I mean, it's my pet name, don't you see, and it wouldn't do."

"No," he said, dryly. "Perhaps it wouldn't."

"My real name is Anna," she continued, "Anna Wilson. You understand, don't you?" Even for the sake of the disguise, she could not endure that he should think of her as Poppy.

"Real name Anna, pet name Poppy, address care of Miss Anna—hullo?" he stopped writing on his cuff and looked down at her sternly. "You seem to have the same name as the elderly lady who looks after you. How's this? I don't believe your name is Anna at all."

This was a little hard, as it was the only true statement she had yet made.

"My name *is* Anna," she said, indignantly. "And so is hers. It's only a coincidence that we both have the same name ; in fact, it was because of that that we first made friends, years ago at school. You see, we began by being at school together, and we've been together ever since, more or less. And—and when I left home, she let me come and live in her flat, that's all. It doesn't seem odd to me, but perhaps you don't know much about girls' Christian names? And she isn't elderly at all! She's young, and rather pretty, and——"

"Oh, all right ; I don't care what she's like. Don't forget about Monday ; and look here, you can come in that hat ; it's rather nice. Good-bye."

"I shall wear my very oldest hat and all the clothes that don't suit me," she resolved, rebelliously, as she went downstairs.

She surprised her maid very much at dinner-time, that evening, by laughing softly to herself at intervals ; and she might have been discovered, more than once, with her elbows on the mantelshelf, gazing at the reflection of herself in the mirror. But as the evening

evening wore on she became, first fretful, then sober, then determined ; and she went to bed with a carefully composed letter in her head, which was to be sent without fail on the following morning. She came down to breakfast and wrote it ; kept it till lunch-time, and stamped it ; re-read it at tea-time, and burnt it. She was very cross all the evening, and decided that she was run down, and wanted a change. The next morning she was convinced she had influenza, and took a large dose of ammoniated quinine, and sent a special messenger to her greatest friend. Her greatest friend was out of town, which reminded her that she wanted a change, and she telegraphed to Brighton for rooms. The reply came that they would be vacant on Monday, and she wired back that she did not want them at all. The next day was Sunday and her At Home day ; and she came to the conclusion that her circle of friends was a very dull one, and that no one who was a bit nice ever called on her At Home day, and that the only interesting people were the people who never called on one at all, the people, in fact, whom one met in odd ways without any introduction ; and at this point of her reflections she laughed unaccountably, and resolved to give up her At Home day. She had made two engagements with two separate friends for Monday afternoon ; but when it came, she threw them both over and started for a walk across the park at half-past one. At a quarter to two she hailed a hansom in the Bayswater road, and told the cabman to drive quickly, and at his own not unreasonable request supplied him further with an address in the West of London. And at two precisely, she was toiling up the long flights of stone stairs that led to Askett's studio, wondering crossly what had induced her to embark in such an absurd enterprise, and still more what was making her persist in it now.

“It's quite reasonable to undertake to do a mad thing one day,
but

but to go and *do* it the next is unpardonable," she grumbled to herself, as she knocked at the door of the middle studio. She remembered with relief that Tom Hallaford had gone abroad for a few weeks, which considerably lessened the chances of detection; and for the rest—it was an adventure, and that was always something. So it was her usual smiling, rather impudent face that finally greeted Askett when he opened the door to her.

"So you didn't forget, after all? Made sure you would," he observed. "People who forget their own names can forget anything."

"I didn't forget my own name," said Anna, truthfully, a remark of which he naturally missed the point.

They did not talk at all for the first hour or so, and Anna began to feel distinctly bored. Being a model was not half so much fun as she had expected to find it, and it made her extremely sleepy. She had hoped for a new sensation, and the only one she felt was an overwhelming dulness. Nothing but her sense of the ridiculous prevented her from throwing up the whole game on the spot, but a single glance at his stern, uncompromising features kept her silent. "Just imagine how he would sneer!" she thought; and the mere idea made her toss her head and laugh scornfully.

"Keep still, please," he said, inexorably. "What's the joke?"

"That is precisely what I can't tell you," said Anna, laughing again. "If I did it wouldn't be a joke at all, you see."

"I'm afraid I don't, but that may be because I haven't known you long enough to have grasped your system of conversation. It's rather difficult to talk to a person who only tells you the ends of her thoughts, as it were. If I were a conjurer, or a medium, or somebody like that, it might be all right."

"It

"It isn't half so difficult as talking to a person who doesn't talk at all," retorted his model.

"Perhaps not," said Askett, indifferently. "Will you kindly lower your chin a little, it has a tendency to—thanks. You were saying——"

"I was saying that conversation with a person who is only interested in your stupid chin isn't any fun at all," said Anna, who was beginning to feel both tired and cross. Askett glanced at her with a look of mild surprise.

"Then why be a model?" was all he said.

"That's exactly what I want to know myself. I mean," she added, hastily, "it isn't my fault. I—I wouldn't be a model if I could help it, but I can't."

"Models never can help it," said Askett, sceptically. "Troubles at home, I suppose? Your friends don't know you sit? I thought so. Never knew you'd have to come to this, and so on. Of course, yes."

"You're very unfeeling," remarked Anna, who had assented by nods to the touching story of her life as related by Askett. "You should try being a model for an afternoon, and then you'd know."

"My dear young lady, one occupation at a time is always enough for a man," said Askett, quietly. "Probably that is why I am interested merely in your features. Does the elderly lady, I mean the other Anna, know that you are a model?"

"Yes, she does," said Anna, fervently. "She doesn't like my doing it at all; but how can I help it? She thinks it is too hard work, and I *quite* agree with her."

"If you don't mind," said Askett, who had not been listening; "I wish you would keep to subjects that don't excite you quite so much. Whenever you are being smart, or funny, or injured, you poke your chin in the air; and it's disconcerting. Supposing you were

were to think of some quiet elderly topic, such as cats, or politics, or the lesser clergy?"

"Perhaps, if I were to think of nothing to say at all, you would like it better," cried Anna.

"Perhaps," said Askett, with a stony indifference.

"I may as well tell you," continued Anna, controlling her indignation with difficulty, "that whenever I am silent I have a most *horrible* expression."

"Never mind about the expression," said Askett. "That's my business, not yours. Sulk away as much as you please, as long as it keeps you quiet."

In spite of his want of interest in her and his utter lack of observation, he was considerably astonished when she sprang suddenly down from her platform, overturning the chair with a clatter, and faced him angrily. It was unlike any previous experience he had had with models, and he began to realise that there was something unusual about this one, though what it was he did not precisely know, and that the moment had come for him to deal with it. So he put down his charcoal, and pulled forward a chair and a box; led her gently to the chair and sat down on the box himself, and felt for his tobacco-pouch.

"Now, look here," he said, holding up his hand to stop her as she began to speak; "I know all about it. So, if you don't mind, I think we'll cut the first part. You've not been used to such treatment, and you didn't come here to be insulted. Very well; you didn't. But you came here to be my model, and I naturally expect you to behave like a model, and not like any other young woman who wishes to make conversation. Surely, that's reasonable, isn't it?"

"It might be if—I liked being a model, perhaps. But I don't," said Anna, rather lamely. She had found her new sensation,

tion, but it did not amuse her ; she had never been lectured before, and she was not sure whether she felt angry or merely puzzled. Askett smiled slightly.

"That is hardly my fault," he replied. "I didn't suggest your vocation to you, did I?"

She was burning to tell him that he had, that he, and her own freakishness, and Fate, were entirely responsible for her vocation ; but again the dread of his ridicule kept her silent, and she only baffled him once more by breaking into a peal of mirthful laughter.

"Oh, heavens!" he groaned. "How is one to deal with a thing like that? What in the name of wonder is the joke *now*?"

"It—it's the same joke as before," gasped Anna. "You really don't know what an awfully good joke it is."

"You must forgive me if I don't even want to find out," said Askett, shortly ; and he got up and went to the window and looked out. The situation was not dignified, and he apostrophised the whole race of models, and wondered why they could not see that a chap wanted to work, instead of playing up to him with their hopelessly feminine ways. And then he realised that this particular one had stopped laughing, and was waiting for him to say something.

"Well?" he said gruffly.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Anna, who was secretly a little ashamed of herself. The fact is, I'm rather a new hand at being a model, and it still makes me feel drowsy, and if I hadn't talked nonsense just now I should have gone to sleep. It isn't so very long since I had to earn my own living, and one doesn't get used to it all at once, don't you know. Shall I go on sitting, now?"

He did not answer for a second or two. For the first time he had noticed her way of speaking, and it struck him that perhaps she

she was less of a fraud than most models who profess to have come down in the world, and that her family might have been decent people after all. He began to feel a little remorse for having been hard on her.

"Look here," he said, still gruffly. "I'm not going to do any more to-day. And I think you won't quite do for what I wanted, so you needn't come back to-morrow. I'll pay you all the same till the end of the week, so you'll be able to take a holiday with a clear conscience. Perhaps, you won't find it so tiring when you've had a rest. And the next chap you sit for may not mind your talking."

She stood quite still while he went across the room to fetch her cloak. Somehow, she was not so pleased at her unexpected deliverance as she would have been ten minutes ago. She had an uncomfortable sensation of having behaved like a child, and added to this was a vague feeling of shame at allowing him to think she was poor and friendless, and in need of his help. So she stepped up to him and took the cloak out of his hand.

"I don't want a holiday, thank you," she said. "You are a brick, but I would sooner keep my part of the bargain if you'll let me. I wasn't really tired, I was lazy."

He shrugged his shoulders, and realised that his pity had been wasted.

"As you like," he said, shortly, and Anna climbed up to her chair again.

It was indisputable that she was an irreproachable model for the rest of the afternoon, that she abstained from all temptation to elevate her chin, and met his few attempts at conversation with subdued monosyllables; but for all that, the wish to work had completely deserted him, and he yawned at last and looked at his watch, and said it was time for tea.

"You

"You may talk now," he said, as he put on the kettle.

"Thanks. But there isn't anything to say," said Anna.

"Does that make any difference?" he asked, with an unexpected smile that propitiated her; and she came down and offered to cut the bread and butter. He shook his head, and possessed himself of the loaf.

"Stay where you are, I'll look after this. Women always make it taste of the knife! Hullo! offended again? I'm sorry, but you know they do."

"They don't in—in the other Anna's flat. But you've never been there, of course; and I suppose you'll never go, will you?"

"Depends on the other Anna, doesn't it? Do you think she'd have me?"

"I'm quite certain she would," said his model, with such assurance that a less absorbed person would have suspected something of the truth. As it was, he only looked slightly amused and asked for a reason.

"Oh, because Anna always likes odd people who don't talk much; and she doesn't think them musty or anything like that, just because they're not usual. She'd call you interesting, and quarrel with every one who didn't agree with her, and be frightfully glad all the while because they didn't."

"Sugar?" asked Askett, who had again not been listening.

"Two lumps, please. So do you, don't you? I *knew* you would! So does Anna. I think you'd like Anna too, rather."

"Ah! What makes you think that?"

"Well, you've got some sense of humour, enough to know she wasn't really laughing at you. Most people are afraid of her, you know; and they think she doesn't feel things because she laughs; and of course she does feel them all the same. She hates people

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to be afraid of her ; but you are never afraid of any one, are you ? And you'd understand why she laughs. Oh yes, you'd like Anna."

"You are a very devoted friend," said Askett.

"I believe I do like her better than any one else I know," admitted Anna.

"Better than yourself ?"

"Much better," she said, and began laughing again with no apparent reason.

"Oh dear," said Askett, "is it that joke again ?"

But she was afraid of rousing his suspicions, and evaded his question. She was very anxious, just then, that his suspicions should not be roused.

When she left, he asked her again if she would not like to have a holiday till the end of the week.

"Am I such a very bad model then ?" she asked.

"You are the most irritating model I have ever endured, but you can come back at two to-morrow," was his reply.

Several times that evening, she took up her pen to write and tell him that she would not come any more, and each time she laid it down again, and jerked her small chin into the air, and vowed she would go through with it.

"It is an adventure," she said, "and it is too rare to be wasted."

"So for the sake of an adventure, she knocked once more at the door of Askett's studio. He opened it immediately, and held out his hand in greeting ; but he was very businesslike in his manner, and set to work directly she was ready.

"I shall try your profile to-day," he said, screwing up his easel.

"You'll regret it," observed Anna.

"Possibly.

"Possibly. Kindly turn your head a little further away ; that'll do. What's wrong about your profile, please ?"

"There's nothing wrong about it," she said, indignantly. "But I always show people my full face if I can ; it's got more character."

"Women are so commercial," remarked Askett. "They make the most of every little advantage they think they possess."

"I must say," retorted Anna, "that for one who professes so much scorn for the whole sex, your perpetual desire to drag it into the conversation is most surprising."

"How is the other Anna ?" asked Askett, rather suddenly.

"Oh, she's all right. She isn't so sure she would like you as I expected her to be."

"Indeed ? Can't she contemplate my appalling silence without shuddering ? Or is it because my face hasn't got any character in it ?"

"Oh, no, your face is all right. And she wouldn't mind your being silent in the least, because she does all the talking herself. She'd only expect you to listen."

"What a clatter there must be when you get together," observed Askett.

"It generally has the effect of silencing us both," said Anna, gravely. "Am I sitting better to-day ?"

"A little, yes. But I think I'll try the full face again ; perhaps, you won't bob your head round quite so often if you are obliged to look at me."

"One would think I *wanted* to look at you," pouted Anna.

"That is certainly what you have led me to believe," said Askett, looking for another sheet of paper. "Now, don't flare up for nothing at all ; I didn't mean to be rude, and I wasn't rude ;
and

and if you persist in jumping whenever I say anything you don't like, I shall relapse into silence again."

"And on the whole," said Anna, thoughtfully, "your remarks *are* a little improvement on that deadly silence."

"Now," said Askett, pressing down the drawing pins; "tell me some more about the other Anna. I like your expression when you talk about the other Anna, it's so appreciative. I believe you are a solitary instance of a woman who can endure the charms of another woman without feeling jealous."

"Perhaps it is only the charms of the other Anna," she said, carelessly. "What do you want to know about her?"

"Oh, anything, everything. What does she do, for instance?" said Askett, vaguely. His temporary interest in a woman, who was *not* there with the express purpose of distracting him, was already vanishing as he began to grow interested in his work.

"Do? Has she got to *do* anything? You surely don't suppose she is a model, or anything like that, do you? She's much too lazy to do things; she just has a good time, that's all. All her people are away or dead or at war with her; and she has some money of her own, not nearly enough of course, but still it's something. And she dresses rather well, and has a charming flat—I don't believe you are listening to a word I say, and it's too bad!"

"Indeed I am. It is my way of appearing interested. She dresses rather well, and has a charming flat. What more, please?"

"How much more do you want? That's enough for most people. And why do you want to know all about Anna, when you've never seen her?"

"Oh, surely, because you wanted something to talk about.

Besides,

Besides, you said she would like me. Isn't that enough reason for a man? Chin a little lower, please."

"I said you would like her," said Anna, slowly. "Do you—do you think you would?"

"What do you think?" he asked, smiling at her sudden earnestness. She laughed.

"I think she would irritate you beyond measure! And you would hate her for being frivolous, and she would hate you for being serious."

"Decidedly, we had better not be introduced," said Askett.

The next day, the door was ajar when she arrived, and she pushed it open and walked in without knocking.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and then paused and reddened with pleasure.

"Hullo! it's you, is it?" said Askett, coming forward. "What's up now?"

"Flowers! How beautiful! Where did they come from? I thought you never had any. Oh, doesn't it make the whole place look different?"

"They're all right, I suppose," he replied, indifferently. "Flowers always are. I'm glad you like them, they'll help you not to feel bored, perhaps. You curious child, to make all that fuss over a lot of daffodils! Does the other Anna like flowers as much as you do?"

She turned away with a little movement of dissatisfaction. Of course it was absurd, but for all that she found it impossible to control her growing jealousy for the other Anna.

After that, there were always flowers when she came for a sitting, and she came very often indeed. For Askett was at work

on

on the illustrations for an eighteenth-century novel, and she posed several times for him as his heroine, a bewitching little figure in a quaint old cloak and large be-feathered hat. They were very good friends by the time the spring came, able to dispute without misconception, and to remain silent without embarrassment ; and Askett, to judge by results, had long ago managed to grasp the system by which her conversation was made. The principal theme of it was still the other Anna ; for, as the beginning of the year grew older, the difficulty of telling him the truth became increasingly greater. It would have meant, at least, some sort of an explanation, and she could not endure explaining why she did things ; indeed, she rarely knew why. Besides, it would have put an end to the sittings, and the sittings amused her enormously, and she always went on doing what amused her. So she continued to impersonate the heroine of the eighteenth-century novel, and her conversation was still about the other Anna.

One day he was more silent than usual. He tried her in various positions and gave them all up in turn, made sketches on odd bits of paper and flung them aside, and ended in throwing down his pencil and saying he was no good.

“Have you got a headache ?” she asked him.

“Headache ? No, I’m all right,” he said, in the resentful manner with which he repelled all her attempts to find out something about him. “Women always think you’re ill if you feel a bit off colour,” he added, as though to explain his abruptness.

“The other Anna,” she observed, “always has a headache when she is off colour, as you call it. She had one this morning.”

“Ah,” said Askett, brightening a little, “tell me about the other Anna. Why is she off colour to-day ?”

“Because she is in love,” said Anna, lightly ; and she crossed her feet and leaned back in her chair and looked at him.

“In

“In love? The other Anna in love? Why, you told me she had too much sense of humour ever to fall in love. Who’s the chap?” It was very ridiculous, but he could not help the sudden pang of disappointment he felt on hearing that the other Anna was in love. It disturbed his impression of her, and he had not known until that moment how strong that impression had grown.

“Oh, he doesn’t know she’s in love with him, and she couldn’t possibly let him know, because he might have a sense of humour too; and then he’d just scoff, and she’d want to kill herself. It—it’s a tragedy to fall in love if you’ve got a sense of humour, isn’t it? Oh, of course you don’t know.” And she began humming a tune.

“Why don’t I know? Because I am never in love, or because I have no sense of humour?”

“Oh, you’ve got a sense of humour right enough,” she said, and went on singing softly to herself. Askett put down his pipe half-smoked.

“What is the other Anna like when she is in love?” he asked, and smiled at his wish to know.

“I only know she’s very difficult to live with,” replied his model, ruefully. “She’s very happy or very sad all the time, and she gets impatient with me, as though I could help it. So absurd, isn’t it? Poor Anna! You see, she has never been in love before, and she can’t make it out. I wish, I do wish she were not in love now; it spoils everything so.”

“It generally does,” said Askett; and his eyes travelled slowly from the pair of pointed shoes up the pink silk cloak to the large black hat, and turned away swiftly when they rested on her face. “Have you ever been in love?” he asked, suddenly.

“Yes,” she said, promptly, and fixed her eyes on him so persistently

persistently that she brought his reluctant gaze back to her, and then laughed softly in his face. "Have you?" she asked.

He smiled indulgently, and returned to the other Anna. "What a fool the fellow must be," he said, jestingly, "to give up a woman like that when she's good enough to fall in love with him."

"Oh, I don't think so," said Anna. "He doesn't know; men never do. And she can't tell him; women never can. It's such hard lines; her life is being quite spoilt because she mustn't say anything. She wouldn't mind so much if she were quite sure the man didn't like her; she'd pull herself together again, and go on. But how is she to find out?"

"Why doesn't she send you to ask him?" suggested Askett.

"Do you know," she said with a queer little smile, "you've made that same old joke again?"

But he noticed that, this time, it did not move her to one or her irresistible peals of laughter.

"After all," she added, casually, "I am not sure that it is a joke at all."

Askett got up and went to look after the kettle; tea would make a diversion, he thought, and they seemed to be in need of a diversion that afternoon. "It strikes me," he said, with his back to her, "that you let yourself worry too much about the love affairs of the other Anna."

"Perhaps I do," replied Anna with the same enigmatical smile. "But it's chiefly your fault; you always want to hear about her, and you never let me talk about anything else. It isn't very flattering to *me*, I must say!" She ended with a pout.

Askett stood up and smiled thoughtfully.

"How absurd!" he said with a half-laugh. "Go and tell your Anna that some one is in love with her, because he has
heard

heard that she is a woman with a sense of humour and a heart ; and see if it doesn't cure her depression !”

“I shouldn't be surprised if it did,” replied Anna.

When she made ready to go, that day, he forgot to put on her cloak for her, and stood irresolutely looking at her with the old nervous frown come back to his face ; and she guessed instinctively that there was something he had to say to her.

“What is it ?” she said, involuntarily.

“It's just this,” he said, speaking very quickly ; “I don't think I shall want you any more after next week, and——”

He stopped, although she had not said anything. She looked steadily at the pink silk cloak that hung across the chair, at the jug of wallflowers on the mantel-shelf, at the two empty cups on the upturned wooden box ; and she drew in her lips with a sharp breath.

“Yes,” she said, and held out her hand. “Good-bye.”

“And when may I come and meet the other Anna ?” he asked, smiling.

There was already a yard and a half of stone passage between them ; and the space was widening every minute, as she backed towards the staircase, and he into the middle studio.

“I am afraid she would have too much sense of humour to receive you,” she said, and laughed mockingly, and went away down the long flights of stone stairs.

“It's all right,” said Askett, congratulating himself. “She doesn't care. I might have known she wouldn't. These models—ah well !” He flung the pink silk cloak on the floor, and sat down on the chair, and relighted his pipe. “I believe, if she had told me much more about the other girl, I might have fancied myself in love with her. It would be a queer thing, after holding off for all these years, to fall in love with a woman I have never seen ! I wonder what it was that fetched me in that child's

descriptions of her? Strange how fascinating a picture those stray bits of information have made in my mind! Probably, if I were to meet her in the ordinary way, I shouldn't discover any charm in her at all; women are so secretive. I begin to understand the reason for arranging marriages. All the same, I should like to meet her." His eye fell on the pink cloak, as it lay in an effete and shapeless heap on the floor. "There's something very expressive in a woman's clothes, when you've known the woman," he observed, to change the current of his thoughts. But they soon wheeled round again. "I wonder how the other Anna would look in that thing? It's very odd to have kept my interest in the same woman for six, seven, eight weeks, and a woman I haven't even seen. I suppose it's true that all the constancy in a man's heart is for the women he has never seen, but still— However, it's a safe passion, and I won't risk it by making her acquaintance. No," he added, moving his chair round so that he could not see the pink silk cloak, "I will not ask for an introduction to the other Anna."

On his way home he ran against Tom Hallaford, and they walked down Piccadilly together. Tom Hallaford was only just back from Rome, and it was consequently some time before the conversation became sufficiently local and personal to interest his companion, who had not been to Rome at all. But Askett got his chance after a while.

"Yes, I've been pretty busy," he said, in reply to an inquiry about his work. "By the way, you remember that model or yours I took pity on, one day in the winter, when you kept her waiting? Oh yes, you do; pretty little girl rather, big hat, name Wilson, lives with a Miss Angell. My dear fellow, one would think you had never even heard her name! Well, never mind about the model; I don't want to talk about her. But I
do

do want to know something about the girl she lives with, the other Anna, you know—Miss Angell, in fact.”

“I suppose you know what you’re playing at,” said Tom, good-naturedly; “but I’m bothered if I do. Miss Angell doesn’t live with any one as far as I know. She never introduced me to a model in her life; in fact, I only know her very slightly. Some aunt of hers commissioned me to paint her portrait; that was how she came to sit for me. Who is the model you were talking about? You must have got mixed somehow, old chap.”

“Mixed?” said Askett, mechanically, standing in a vague manner on the edge of the kerbstone. “Mixed, yes, that’s it, of course; certainly mixed. I suppose—in fact, I believe—well, it’s that joke, you know.” And to the mystification of his companion, who stood staring after him, he beckoned with an exaggerated composure to a hansom, gave the driver an address in Belgravia, and drove away without a word of farewell.

The other Anna answered her own bell, that evening, because her maid was out for a holiday. And she found Askett standing on the door mat outside.

“Oh!” was all she could find to say, though it was extremely expressive in the particular way she said it.

“It’s all right,” said Askett, in the most courteous and self-possessed manner possible. “I’ve only come to ask the other Anna to marry me, instead of the chap who doesn’t know how to appreciate her. Do you think she will?”

There was the dawn of a laugh in her eyes as she threw the door wider.

“I believe,” she replied, “that she still has a lurking fondness for the other chap. But if you’ll come in I’ll tell you that little joke of mine, and then——”

“No need,” observed Askett, “I think I know it.”